

Special Topics: The Future Through Film: Ecocide and Dystopias (LOYC 298/2)

Fall 2017

Instructor: Philip Szporer

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Objectives

This course will have as its content the natural environment and our interactions with it as presented through selected films. Students will deconstruct the visual representation of a problem or complex set of problems around the natural environment presented both as "fact" and as "entertainment." The course will be aligned with the educational philosophy of the Loyola College for Diversity and Sustainability that incorporates several distinctive objectives and needs:

- integrate international and global perspectives into higher education;
- foster understanding of how the individual and one's society can operate more effectively in a global context of increased inter-cultural interaction;
- balance discipline-based instruction with interdisciplinary inquiry and cross-disciplinary communication;
- prepare students to excel in further education, professional training, and employment, through the development of communication skills (speaking as well as advanced writing), interpersonal skills, critical thinking, and the use of current technologies;
- develop oneself both as a person and for responsible citizenship and leadership in the 21st Century.

Learning Outcomes

This course intends to engage students in the learning process in a self-directed manner. Successful students will take responsibility for their own learning by having considerable input into the topics to be examined in the class as well as the assignments that will measure their progress. The course will develop basic skills such as critical reading, writing, viewing, self-monitoring, as well as initiate group and individual reflection.

Students will analyze the social and cultural meanings of film and develop critical approaches to concepts in documentary and feature fiction genres. A list of readings (from academic journals and popular articles) and discussions around the scientific and cultural debates (i.e., climate change, water pollution, soil destruction, species annihilation) will accompany the chosen films and documentaries. The films under consideration will be placed in the context of the types of social conflicts and historical background that shaped them. (Note: films are subject to change.)

The course aims to engage students in personal ways. Students should be able to formulate their thoughts, questions and criticisms in a well-organized and articulate manner, express them clearly and concisely in their written assignments, as well as share them in class with the instructor and fellow students.

Course Design/Teaching Format

There will be relatively few formal lectures, as students are expected to engage with the material presented in class and with each other. The weekly modules will have a list of readings and/or resources attached.

The emphasis is to make the course materials relevant to the student's own experience. Students will be encouraged to suggest exceptionally good films and articles they find relevant in terms of the content of this course. At the start of the term, the instructor will engage in a discussion on how to read a film (textual analysis) and discussions about filmmaking and a filmmaker's critical approach will follow.

Part of one lecture will focus on basic key concepts and terms in Film Studies, including directing, cinematography, editing and sound. Students will have the opportunity to create short film projects and workshop them in teams, gaining valuable feedback on their efforts.

Throughout the course, students will be challenged to articulate their own critical analysis through active discussion, written assignments, as well as a group presentation. Students will be responding to the readings and weekly screenings of films and videos, articulating their ideas and arguments, as well as issues raised in the associated readings. Sessions will highlight concepts, arguments, and debates surrounding these films. Written assignments are based upon individual research work concerning the material at hand.

It is essential for students to come to class prepared to discuss the films that will be screened, and the readings, where applicable, which they will have read closely. Students will occasionally be required to watch an entire film in their own time.

Reading list

There is no course text. Readings are posted on the Course Reserves list; navigate to the selections listed under "LOYC 340"). Over the duration of the term, selections may be added or deleted from this list.

Filmography

Films and documentaries are available through the Moving Image Resource Centre (**):
<http://www.concordia.ca/finearts/facilities/moving-image-resource-centre.html>.

Feature Films for the reflective response essay assignment: Metropolis (88 min, silent, 1927 version); A Clockwork Orange (137 min); ~~Children of Men~~ (110 min); China Syndrome (122 min); I am Legend (101 min); Mad Max (94 min); Mad Max 2 (1981); Planet of the Apes (112 min); Silent Running (89 min); Soylent Green (97 min); Tank Girl (144 min); The Handmaid's Tale (film version) (109 min); The Matrix (136 min); The Road (111 min); The Thing (109 min); Tremors (96 min); Wall-E (98 min); Waterworld (136 min); Blade Runner (117 min); Brazil (142 min); 28 Days Later (113 min); Gattaca (106 min); Akira (124 min); The Trial (118 min); Minority Report (145 min); Fahrenheit 451 (152 min); Dark City (151 min).

Grading/Criteria of Evaluation:

Mini assignment on water collection – due week 2	3%
Mini-reviews of any of the films screened in class (2) – due: wks 3, 6, 8, 12 (hard copy for whichever two blocks you prefer) (@15 pts each)	30%
Moodle entries on 8 selected readings (@1.5 pts each)	12%
Reflective essay (500 words) – due: week 7	15%

Film assignment (group work) – due Final Class:

a) Storyboard & Shot List of film	5%
b) Film production, including written description	20%
c) Journal Entry accompanying film	5%
Attendance/Participation	10%

Details about the assignments

• **Mini assignment on Water**

Write about your personal experience in the use/conservation/collection of water. Hard copy, please. Typed, double-spaced, reasonable font size. Due: Week 2 (Sept. 12)

100 words

• **Mini-reviews**

Write two (2) short-form reviews of a chosen film or documentary (500 words), based on the films screened noted for the period (i.e., films screened in weeks 4, 5). Please hand in hard copy on the assigned dates. Typed, doubled-spaced, reasonable font size.

Critically examine an issue or a series of issues raised within the film or documentary. You may choose to bring in ideas explored in one of the course readings. In the body of the piece, provide a very brief summary of the plot and characters.

• **Moodle entries**

Prior to class, on specific weeks, enter one reaction (about one paragraph) on the course Moodle site, based on one of the readings for that week, unless otherwise noted. Eight (8) entries are required per student, each valued at 1.5 points. React critically to the readings. The substance of the entry will, more than likely, focus in on one particular issue or relate to what you watch in class. The process of writing in this manner helps students to process the material, and ensures preparedness for class discussion.

• **Reflective response essay**

The response essay or commentary (500 words maximum) will focus on a feature film chosen from the filmography list on page 2 of the syllabus (Note: documentaries and short films are NOT INCLUDED in this assignment). These films will not be screened in class.

The assignment is designed to allow the student to examine their experience in viewing the particular film; to provide a vehicle for clarify questions and comments on key issues treated in the film; and explore how you may have changed, grown, developed in watching the work, and provide examples of these perspectives. Hard copy, please. Typed, doubled-spaced, reasonable font size. Bibliography and footnotes required, where warranted.

• **Film Production (group work)**

Since almost all students now own electronic devices (smartphone, etc...) that enable them to make videos, and have access to basic video editing software currently available on most home computers, the final assignment will be to a) create a 3-5 minute, edited film on your smartphone. The content is based on one theme or idea explored in the course; b) include a written description of this short film, no longer than one paragraph, and as might be created for a festival program or grant application to accompany the work; c) the group will also submit a written journal entry (500 words max.) expanding on the exercise process, the whys and wherefores of the project, describing the intention and location, what worked and what didn't, thus once again bringing the discussion of visual images and words together.

(See note on group work, next page.) Teams of three will fulfill the roles of director, cinematographer, writer, and editor.

*Representative(s) from each group are required to briefly meet with the instructor during week 6 (October 10) to identify project topics. Parameters for the projects will be discussed in class during week 1-2. A written project proposal of one to two paragraphs will be sent in prior to the meetings (by 5 p.m. on October 9)

Storyboard & shot list (group work)

This assignment will reflect the structure and intent of the film being created by your group.

The storyboard provides the means to work out the visuals of your story. Draw each of the shots you want to get in order to create your films; also, add notes for camera movement (pans, zooms, angles, etc...), plus notes on the audio you want to use in the film.

Once your storyboard is worked out, you can create a list of all the shots you required for each scene you shoot. Because the story is not always told in a chronological order, this is a great way to make sure you get all the shots you want at each location where you film.

Note: Group work is an important part of university education, and the nature of the work world today increasingly requires individuals to consider subjects together, by consequence developing problem-solving and team-building skills.

For this assignment, every member of the group must participate in its preparation. Please keep in mind two principles: You are here to learn, and, most importantly, be respectful of other points of view.

Policy for Writing Evaluation: Students are evaluated on their mastery of language skills. To receive the best grade, you must

- Demonstrate maturity and originality of thought reflected by the ability to analyze, synthesize and evaluate.
- Sustain the development of a point or idea over the length of the assignment.
- Use organized paragraphs and transitional devices.
- Make conventional use of capitalization and punctuation.
- Thoroughly edit your work for grammar, syntax, and spelling of standard English or French, with particular attention to sentence structure and to agreement between subjects, verbs, pronouns and antecedents. Composition counts!

Assignments may be written in French or English. Hard copy papers must be typed, double-spaced, with a clear font size, paginated, and include your name, a title, as well as, where appropriate, proper citations/references, bibliography, filmography, and videography. Grades are based on clarity of expression, observational, descriptive, and analytic skills, and research methods.

All assignments (unless otherwise specified) must be handed in hard copy. Assignments delivered through email will only be accepted in cases of grave illness or circumstance.

Grading Breakdown

90-100	A+	4.3
85-89	A	4.0
80-84	A-	3.7
77-79	B+	3.3

73-76	B	2.7
70-72	B-	2.5
67-69	C+	2.3
63-66	C	2.0
60-62	C-	1.7
57-59	D+	1.3
53-56	D	1.0
50-52	D-	0.7

Attendance guidelines

Attendance will be recorded at the beginning of every class. No more than two justifiable absences will be allowed. Students will be expected to participate actively in class discussions. If you miss one class, your attendance/participation mark will automatically decrease 5%, two absences 10%. Exceptions: if you have a justified absence or a bona fide documented emergency (for example, illness, injury, hospitalization) Please advise early in the term if you are observing religious holidays. Personal travel is not an acceptable reason.

Students are expected to participate actively in critical class discussions based on readings, lectures, conceptual and image research, and screenings. Here is a rough guide that will help you understand how you will be assessed for your participation grade:

- If you attend class every week and say little or nothing: 0-3
- If you attend class every week and speak, but you never do more than regurgitate the course lectures, or voice your personal opinions: 4-7
- If you attend class every week and engage in discussion, listen attentively, and what you have to say is demonstrably informed by the course readings & screenings: 8-10

Lateness policy

Please note that it is exceedingly disruptive to arrive late to class, and students who do so will be marked as absent. Likewise, **students who leave early or who skip parts of the lecture will be marked as absent.** If there are reasonable grounds to be absent for part of the class, please advise me of your situation; it is your responsibility to take the necessary measures to arrive on campus early enough. Should you end up arriving late to the lecture, or if your body demands that you leave the room temporarily, please try to be as discrete as possible in order not to disturb your fellow students. Do this by holding the door gently as it closes rather than letting it bang shut on its own.

Late work is not encouraged. If you have a valid reason for postponing assignment submissions, such as a death in the family or a serious illness, please contact me (or the Department contact), and we'll arrange a reasonable alternative. Otherwise, a point will be deducted for each day the paper is late (i.e., 1 point).

Plagiarism

The most common offense under the Academic Code of Conduct is plagiarism, which the Code defines as "the presentation of the work of another person as one's own or without proper acknowledgement" (Article 16^a). This could be material copied word for word from books, journals, Internet sites, professor's course notes, etc. It could be material that is paraphrased but closely resembles the original source. It could be the work of a fellow student, for example, an answer on a quiz, data for a lab report, a paper or assignment

completed by another student. It might be a paper purchased through one of the many available sources. Plagiarism does not refer to words alone – it can also refer to copying images, graphs, tables, and ideas. "Presentation" is not limited to written work. It also includes oral presentations, computer assignments and artistic works. If you translate the work of another person into French or English and do not cite the source, this is also plagiarism. If you cite your own work without the correct citation, this too is plagiarism.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty and to ensure you avoid committing any offenses by reading the University's Academic Code of Conduct:

<http://www.concordia.ca/students/academic-integrity/plagiarism.html>

Other Course Policies

Language: The language of instruction is English. You may submit your written work in French; however, my comments on your papers will normally be in English.

Electronic Equipment: Turn off and put away all electronic devices, i.e., mobile phones, video games, etc. This class is **not** the place to check Facebook, surf, text-message, or engage in other distracting and disruptive behaviour with electronic devices. Save it for after class or during the break. If there is a legitimate reason to leave your mobile phone on, please notify me in advance, put the phone on vibrate mode, and sit near the door so you can easily depart the class to take your urgent call. Students breaching this policy during the lecture will be penalized on their participation grades, including a possible grade of zero for participation, at the discretion of the course instructor. Take this warning seriously.

Laptop computers are acceptable for note-taking alone and not for any other purpose.

Food: No eating in class. Please take care of your hunger before the session or at break time.

Chatting in class: Refrain from distracting chatting with your neighbours, out of respect for the other students and the professor.

Campus Resources

Students with Disabilities: Students with a documented disability (e.g. physical, learning, psychological, vision, hearing, etc.) who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations is encouraged to contact the Access Centre for Students with Disabilities at the beginning of the semester. <http://www.concordia.ca/students/accessibility.html>

Student Success Centre: Will assist in improving your academic skills and learning potential (including writing skills). <http://www.concordia.ca/students/success/learning-support.html>

Weekly schedule (subject to change)

Week 1 – Sept. 5: Introduction

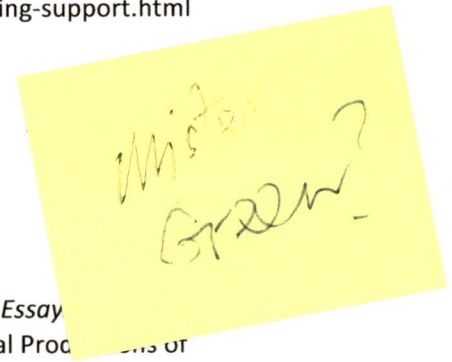
Screening: *Plastic Bag* + *Neighbours* + discussion

Required reading: Fátima Vieira, "The Concept of Utopia."

Week 2 – Sept. 12

Screening: *No Land, No Food, No Life* + *Cowspiracy* + discussion

Required reading: Genese Marie Sodikoff. *The Anthropology of Extinction: Essay and Species Death*. Read the Introduction – Accumulating Absence: Cultural Productions of the Sixth Extinction.



Week 3 – Sept. 19

Screening: *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* + *Rakka* + discussion

Required reading: Richard A. Slaughter, *Futures Beyond Dystopia, Creating Social Foresight. "Aspects of Futures Enquiry": "A twenty-first-century agenda", "Are there futures beyond Dystopia?"*

>> Assignment: Mini-review on films shown in weeks 1 + 2

Week 4 – Sept. 26

Screening: *An Inconvenient Truth* + Filmmaking & Editing Information Session

Guest: independent filmmaker Marites Carino

Required reading: Broderick, Mick. *Surviving Armageddon: Beyond the Imagination of Disaster*.

Suggested readings: Louis Giannetti and Jim Leach, "Nonfiction film," in *Understanding Movies*.

James Monaco, "The Language of Film: Signs," in *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media and Beyond*.

Week 5 – October 3

Screening: *Up the Yangtze* + *Drux Flux* + *Very Nice, Very Nice* + discussion

Required reading: George Monbiot, "Civilisation Ends with a Shutdown of Human Concern: Are We There Already?"

Week 6 – October 10

Screening: *Snowpiercer* + discussion

Required reading: Gregory Clayaes, "Three Variants On The Concept of Dystopia," in Fátima Vieira (ed.), *Dystopia(n) matters: On the Page, on Screen, on Stage*, (note: only pages 14-18).

>> Assignment: Mini-review on films shown in weeks 3, 4, 5

>> Meetings to discuss film project – times TBA (before and after class); written proposals sent in by 9 a.m., October 10

Week 7 – October 17

Feature film: *Ex Machina* + discussion + Storyboard/Shot List session

>> Assignment: Reflective essay on a feature film (see page 3 of syllabus)

Week 8 – October 24

Screening: *Hands-On – women, climate, change* + *Sisters on the Planet* + *Chasing Ice* + discussion

Required reading: Una Chaudhuri and Shonni Enelow, "Theorizing Ecocide: The Theatre of Eco-Cruelty," *Research Theatre, Climate Change, and the Ecocide Project*.

>> Assignment: Mini-review on films shown in weeks 6 + 7

Week 9 – October 31

Feature film: *Children of Men* + *La Jetée* + discussion

Required reading: Gerhard Wiesenfeld, "Dystopian Genesis: The Scientist's Role in Society, According to Jack Arnold."

Week 10 – November 7

Screening: *Last Train Home* + *Being Caribou* + discussion

Week 11 – November 14

Screening: *Watermark* + *Gyre: Creating Art from a Plastic Ocean* + *Albatross* + discussion

Suggested reading: Blake Fitzgerald and Marc Glassman, "Water Projects: Burtynsky, Baichwal, and de Pencier."

Note: A fine edit consultation can be scheduled with instructor.

Week 12 – November 21

Screening: *Crapshoot: The Gamble with our Wastes* + *Scared Sacred* + discussion

Note: Fine edit consultation can be scheduled with instructor.

>> Assignment Due: Storyboard & Shot List of proposed film

>> Assignment: Mini-review on films shown in weeks 9, 10, 11

Week 13 – November 28: Film festival showing

>> Assignment Due: Completed film + Journal entry + Film description